



News Release

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Oyster-related illnesses prompt health advisory for recreational harvesters

Eating oysters raw can make you sick; make sure to cook them properly

OLYMPIA — With the weather warm and low tides good for harvesting shellfish, many Washington residents are heading for the state's beaches to collect oysters. Cooking those oysters correctly will ensure they're part of a safe, healthy meal.

Several illnesses associated with undercooked oysters have already been reported to the state Department of Health. Recreational harvesters should follow some simple tips to make sure the shellfish they gather are safe to eat. Most important is to cook oysters at 145° F for 15 seconds. This will kill the natural bacteria that thrive as the water temperatures increase.

One type of bacteria that can make people sick is *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, a naturally-occurring marine bacterium that can cause vibriosis. Symptoms can include diarrhea, nausea, stomach cramps, headache, vomiting, fever, and chills. Symptoms usually appear within 12 to 24 hours of eating infected shellfish. The symptoms are usually mild to moderate. They last for two to seven days, but can be life-threatening for people with lowered immunity or chronic liver disease.

Recreational harvesters should practice these tips when harvesting oysters this summer to stay healthy and avoid vibriosis:

- Make sure oysters are placed on ice or refrigerated immediately after harvest.
- Don't harvest oysters that have been exposed by the receding tide for a longer than a couple of hours — if the temperature's high, pass them by.
- Always cook oysters thoroughly. *Vibrio* bacteria are destroyed when oysters are cooked at 145° F for 15 seconds. Fully cooked oysters can be contaminated again if rinsed with seawater.

—More—

Vibrio warning

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More information on shellfish safety is on the Department of Health [Office of Shellfish and Water Protection's Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/>).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for *a healthy dose of information*.